

Trax Academy

Independent school inspection report

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Unique Reference Number (URN)	131563
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Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Trax Academy is a special school for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All the current students have statements of special educational need related to this. There are nine students on roll, all boys, aged 15 and 16. All are looked after young people who reside in homes run by the TRAX group and who have been placed at the school by a number of local authorities. Students' behaviour has typically led to exclusion from school and a number have committed criminal offences.

The school opened in 2006. This is its first inspection. It is part of a small group of related businesses that comprise a motor vehicle karting and race track; an environmental energy company and a youth apprenticeship centre located together on a riverside site near Preston. In April 2010 the company opened a newly-built windsports centre in Lytham St Anne's, 10 miles away. This is used by the school as a second site.

The school offers a vocationally based alternative curriculum that aims to 'ensure successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve..... and who can make a positive contribution to society.' It also aims to re-engage students in learning, to foster positive attitudes to work and to equip students with specific skills related to motor vehicle engineering that will provide a direct route into employment.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education at Trax Academy is good. The proprietor, headteacher and staff are passionate about their vision to make a difference to each student who joins, in showing them an alternative, more positive way forward in their lives. The vocational curriculum is highly motivating: students gain qualifications and develop skills that are directly relevant to future employment.

The school meets its stated aims well, successfully equipping students to be able to become 'a positive and effective member of society' and 'an effective member of the workforce'. The school meets most of the regulations. Students successfully develop literacy, numeracy and life skills, but a few other aspects of the curriculum are

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pib4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

missing. The promotion of students' health, safety and welfare is good overall and the management of risk is excellent. Procedures for safeguarding and for child protection are outstanding.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good overall. It is organised into three equal parts: one-third basic skills, one-third vocational training and one-third work-related learning, including regular work experience. The whole is aimed at equipping students with the skills they will need to gain employment and thus be able to live independently. The vocational and work-related aspects of the curriculum are outstanding and meet students' needs particularly well. There are very good opportunities for students to learn useful skills and to gain qualifications that are directly relevant to future employment. Students say they find the practical aspects of the curriculum exciting and that they are keen to learn. Parent, carers and local authorities comment very favourably on the relevance of the curriculum and the extent to which it promotes positive attitudes. The basic skills elements of the curriculum such as literacy, numeracy and life skills fill in the gaps in students' prior learning and prepare them to lead independent lives. However, there is no science and no provision for human and social education. There is no planned programme for personal, social and health education, though a few parts, such as sex and relationships education, are taught.

A written curriculum policy is in place but has not been updated to cover all the areas of learning required. Apart from the gaps mentioned above, appropriate schemes of work are in place. Art is a core subject and music lessons are arranged where a student shows an interest. These creative subjects make a therapeutic contribution to the curriculum. There is a good programme of activities during holiday periods. The curriculum is highly appropriate to re-engage students in learning and to foster positive attitudes to work. Accordingly, there is a strong focus on vocational and practical learning and development of specific skills in these, principally motor vehicle maintenance, driving skills for motorbikes and heavy plant machinery, such as forklift trucks and diggers, construction and, recently, water and sand sports. All courses lead to accreditation and qualifications, such as National Vocational Qualifications, City and Guilds, and the Association of Qualifications Alliance (AQA) units of accreditation. Students follow Entry level courses in adult literacy and numeracy. The driving standards agency approved course 'Momentum', fosters responsible attitudes to motorbike driving.

The school's enterprising approach to working together with business and the community to develop the skills employers require has been recognised by the Go4It award given by the Headteachers, Teacher and Industry organisation (HTI). The school has been invited to be a case study of good practice in education and risk management. The curriculum is continuing to expand. The new windsports centre offers additional sporting opportunities and further work-related qualifications.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers and instructors have very good knowledge, experience and expertise in their different areas of work. They are

highly skilled at motivating the students. Explanations are clear, with a good balance between encouraging independence and managing safety. Students benefit from very small classes and usually one-to-one tuition, which helps keep them on task. Care staff assist appropriately in the management of behaviour, to help assure students' safety and well-being.

Resources to support learning are good and are of high quality for practical work and for work-related learning, with purpose-built workshops, outside areas and equipment for driving and racing. Each student is given their own motorbike to maintain and race. In one outstanding lesson, a student was learning how to use tools safely to build a stock car.

Students make good progress, especially in the development of work-related and social skills. All students have a personalised programme matched to their education and training plan. Students generally show positive attitudes to learning, especially in vocational subjects. Their progress in basic skills is slower, but sufficient to enable them to gain accreditation for learning. Some students' progress is limited by the extent of their engagement or attendance. Students' attitudes and cooperation vary, notably in classroom based lessons. The school's records show that strategies to manage behaviour are highly effective in that students' attendance at school and their attitudes to learning are showing considerable improvement. Nevertheless, some students continue to exhibit very challenging behaviour and so there are occasions when restraint has to be used. These are now relatively few.

Students have access to information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning in the classroom and gain accreditation for their skills. However, ICT is not used extensively within the classroom as an aid to motivation and to fostering independent learning habits. The potential for the use of ICT as a tool for other, more practical parts of the curriculum has not yet been explored, for example to aid design. Students are assessed in their basic skills on entry to the school and assessment continues through the key skills portfolios of work and the units for practical subjects. Parents or carers receive a monthly report detailing each student's progress. Links between the three different aspects of the curriculum are evident for the most part, but some opportunities are missed, for example noting how mathematical skills may be developed in the vocational lessons. In its self-evaluation the school recognises that this approach is still developing.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is good. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

The provision for moral and social education is strong, underpinning the school's work in shaping and changing attitudes. Staff are good role models, insisting on basic courtesy and not accepting the use of inappropriate language. Teachers and instructors have significant strengths in forging good relationships with students and in building trust, which helps the students to re-engage in learning. They encourage

students to be resilient, by building up their self-belief. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and can be good when students are well engaged. For many, this represents a significant improvement in their behaviour compared to their recent past. A single behaviour monitoring system operates effectively across the school and in the residential units to reinforce values, such as being organised, helpful and honest. Points gained are linked to a structured system of rewards that students say they find motivating.

Students' social skills are reinforced well through contact with the public on regular work experience and through developing good work habits of timekeeping, reliability and perseverance. Through their good effort students gain work experience places in one of the TRAX companies. These may result in part-time, paid placements, such as racetrack marshals, when students are ready. Students now have additional opportunities to assist the public by qualifying as a beach ranger or lifesaver.

Staff reinforce respect for the law and appropriateness of behaviour. However, despite the school's best efforts, some students do re-offend. The school considers re-admission, operating a 'clean slate' policy, if convinced that another opportunity is justified. A personalised young person's agreement lists conditions of being at the school. Education and training plans are reviewed regularly with students, getting them to take responsibility for learning and for their personal targets.

Spiritual education is satisfactorily provided through opportunities for reflective work in art and music. Students' knowledge of public institutions and services is focused appropriately on the duties of being a law-abiding citizen. To this end, the 'Momentum' driving programme reinforces the rules of the road. The school encourages students to be tolerant and considerate of others, for example to be aware how their actions affect other people. However, there is no programme or teaching aimed at developing their awareness of other religions and cultures to promote understanding and tolerance further.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Procedures and practices to safeguard the welfare, health and safety of the students are good. The school complies with all the regulations. Students' safety and welfare have a high profile as the site includes a race track and workshops for vehicle maintenance. Safety awareness related to work, home and leisure is given high priority throughout the curriculum.

Comprehensive, up-to-date records are kept of all safety checks, including the risk of fire. Thorough risk assessments are conducted for all aspects of school life. The school has been invited to be a case study of excellent practice in education and risk management.

All the required policies that underpin the provision for students' health safety and welfare are in place. One or two, such as the anti-bullying policy, are densely written

and consequently are not easy for students, parents and carers to read. On occasions, information is not fully up-to-date, or policies are not sufficiently referenced to the school. For example, the anti-bullying policy has no reference to cyber-bullying. Some policies are not dated and so it is unclear how the process of regular review is conducted.

Students' health is promoted effectively through spending a good amount of time outdoors in the fresh air and by regular participation in competitive activities such as karting and motocross, to help keep them fit. The windsports centre offers excellent opportunities for the further development of students' physical health and emotional well-being, because of the additional sports and the healthy, beachfront location. Very close attention is paid to students' welfare. This includes access to psychological and other professional support where needed and close liaison with carers. Care workers accompany students in school. Students are very closely supervised at all times, as adjacent parts of the site are used by the public. Staff manage difficult behaviour effectively. Careful records are kept of instances where restraint has been necessary. The school fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Safeguarding checks are robust. All the checks currently required on staff, including the proprietor, have been satisfactorily completed. The school keeps a single central record of the required information. Staff files show that recruitment procedures are thorough.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides safe and effective premises in which students can learn. The premises are particularly well-suited to a school with a strong vocational and work-related curriculum. There are two adjoining classrooms in a semi-demountable building, a small therapy room and a sick room, together with the school offices. These provide a pleasant, clean and tidy working environment.

Outside, the site includes two large, purpose-built workshops for motor vehicle maintenance and other practical activities, such as construction. One of the workshops has a small classroom. These practical workshops, together with the race tracks and driving areas have a significant impact on students' learning and attitudes. They engage them and provide a high quality environment for learning practical skills. The second site is newly converted, adjacent to the beach, with a large classroom area and a range of modern facilities for storage, changing and refreshments. This site is highly suitable for use as a windsports centre by the school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides all the information that is required for parents and carers through its prospectus and website. An up-to-date list of staff is included.

The school does not meet one regulation: it does not provide local authorities with an annual account of income and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each student.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide students with experience in the following areas of learning: scientific; and human and social (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- implement a planned programme of personal, social and health education (paragraph 1(2)(f))

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (standard 2) and must:

- improve the way in which it assists students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures (paragraph 2(e))

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide to local authorities an annual account of income and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each student (paragraph 6(8)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- explore the further potential to use a greater range of ICT resources to promote engagement and independent learning
- consider how the vocational, practical based lessons and the classroom based learning complement each other in developing literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs		✓		
How well students make progress in their learning		✓		

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of students			✓	

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students		✓		
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School details

Name of school	Trax Academy		
DCSF number	888/6093		
Unique reference number (URN)	131563		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	October 2006		
Age range of students	11-18		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 9	Girls: 0	Total: 9
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 9	Girls: 0	Total: 9
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 9	Girls: 0	Total: 9
Annual fees (day students)	£39,000-£65,000		
Address of school	Riverside Park Wallend Road Preston Lancashire PR2 2HW		
Telephone number	017 7273 1832		
Fax number	017 727 31871		
Email address	info@traxgroup.co.uk		
Headteacher	Paul Huard		
Proprietor	Pauline and Edward Sloane		
Reporting inspector	Honoree Gordon HMI		
Dates of inspection	28-29 April 2010		